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Jackson urges mass appeal for release of U.S. hostages

By Rita McWilliams
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5 The Rev. Jesse Jackson, accompanied by the families of three hostages held by Islamic terrorists, yesterday privately briefed members of Congress on his negotiations for their release and urged the Reagan administration to join more actively in the campaign.

"Frankly, from our vantage point, we would appeal to, and negotiate with, the devil in hell if we were in hell burning and the devil was the only one with a fire hose," Mr. Jackson said. "If he would put the fire out, we would thank him, shake his hand and leave hell as quickly as possible."

The Islamic Jihad, the group holding four, or possibly five, U.S. and two French diplomats hostage, warned last week in a statement released in the Lebanese press of "catastrophic" consequences if 17 convicted terrorists held in Kuwait were not released.

The White House has said it is determined to obtain the release of the hostages, but that it will stick by its official policy not to deal with terrorists.

The Reagan administration was helping by agreeing not to obstruct

Mr. Jackson's, and the families', private efforts to obtain the hostages' release, Mr. Jackson said.

Mr. Jackson said he would appeal for their release over Lebanese radio and television, and already has taken out advertisements in Lebanese press asking for information about the hostages.

He is trying to get visas to go to Lebanon and Kuwait for hostage families so they can appeal for the release themselves, and Mr. Jackson said he would accompany them if those trips are allowed. The Kuwaiti government so far has refused a visa to the family of the Rev. Benjamin Weir, 62, a Presbyterian minister, who was taken captive May 8, 1984.

Mr. Jackson, who successfully negotiated the release of U.S. Navy pilot Lt. Robert Goodman who had been shot down over Lebanon when U.S. forces were based there, offered to meet with any organization or government that might be able to convince the terrorists to release the captives.

He has been unable to arrange a meeting between himself and the hostage family members and Secretary of State George Shultz, but Mr. Jackson said yesterday he was expecting a call last night from the

State Department about a possible meeting, or further action.

Reports that the Central Intelligence Agency was involved in a bombing in Beirut "morally bankrupts our policy in the Middle East," and makes it more difficult to negotiate, he said.

He will continue moral appeals for peace and justice, noting that the appeals might work now during the Arab holy season of Ramadan, traditionally a time of compassion, he said. An imminent prisoner exchange in which 1,000 Palestinians would be swapped for three Israeli soldiers also made him more optimistic about negotiating with the terrorists now, he said.

"One has to hope against hope," he said.

The families also will request formal visits with the hostages.

Peggy Say, the sister of hostage Terry Anderson, Middle East bureau chief for the Associated Press, said she believes the State Department "is doing everything it can."

Although she thinks the situation has reached a "crisis point" after the threats by the terrorists last week, she said yesterday she is "more optimistic" that "somewhere along the line a solution is going to come and free them. I can only think positive."